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Carretera San Vicente del Raspeig s/n 03690 San Vicente del Raspeig. Alicante (SPAIN)

[eurau@ua.es](mailto:eurau@ua.es)

# Inclusive practices for living together

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A collaborative regeneration model for social housing neighborhoods

**Di Cintio, Giorgia<sup>1</sup>**

1. Università degli Studi "G.d'Annunzio" Chieti-Pescara, Department of Architecture, Pescara, Italy, giodicint@gmail.com

## Synopsis

Nowadays, contemporary cities show a problematic picture in which economic and environmental crisis and new social needs intersect. In particular, the social housing neighborhoods are affected by this crisis, revealing a physical and functional obsolescence that requires innovative strategies able to dialogue with the existing building heritage. Facing with this complexity, we must think about a project capable of imagining new scenarios, responding 'in the present' to the demand for a better life quality; a project which should be also able to persist over time, adapting itself to the ever changing needs of people. So, new practices for a more inclusive living must be defined, and, where already existing, enhanced. To reach this goal, it is required a new multidisciplinary, multilateral and multi-scalar approach, that looks at the inhabitants as the actors in cities production process. If social sciences have enriched the architectural practice through a qualitative analysis that has allowed to interpret the real inhabitants' needs, today the architects can take on these needs, creating new spaces for social cohesion through architectural practice. Defining new inclusive planning tools is the means to trigger inclusive regeneration processes for social housing neighborhoods that, in this way, can once again give appropriate answers to the quantitative and qualitative challenges facing our cities and which they will face in the future.

**Key words:** Social Housing Neighbourhoods, Inclusive Urban Regeneration, Collaborative Housing, Multidisciplinary Approach, Urban Social Design.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, contemporaries cities show a problematic picture in which economic and environmental crisis and new social needs intersect. In particular, the social housing neighborhoods are affected by this crisis, revealing a physical and functional obsolescence that requires innovative strategies able to dialogue with the existing building heritage. Facing with this complexity, we must think about a project capable of imagining new scenarios, responding in the present to the demand for a better life quality; a project which should be also able to persist over time, adapting itself to the ever-changing needs of people. So, new practices for a more *inclusive living* must be defined, and, where already existing, enhanced.

Although often described as monotonous and criminogenic, at a closer look, these neighborhoods, reveal, in fact, a dynamic system of informal associations that demonstrate the will of the inhabitants to '*take care*' of the places in which they live, describing a scenario made up of new communities.

## 2. European social housing perspectives

If we consider as the ultimate goal of architectural practice, the search for "*an inclusive society that should be enduring, open, undivided, and accessible*"<sup>1</sup>, nowadays the question is to understand how social housing can contribute to reaching this objective; what is its role, therefore, in the future of our cities. The production of cities that could be called *smart*, requires, in fact, commitment in searching for an urban development model that should solve the demand for an *affordable* and *adequate housing*.

For this reason, it seems necessary to start from what already exists, from understanding the planning history of these districts and the life that takes place in them every day. So, implementing clever housing policies means gaining greater awareness of what is happening in these neighborhoods and, at the same time, exploring the links between research and profession, culture, and socio-economic context to define a specific framework, in which the man must return to be the center of reasoning. From the field of sociology to anthropology, from architecture to urban planning, from history to economics, we need to integrate the different disciplines for a *holistic* approach in response to the housing emergency. The future city planning will be smart only if based on this, becoming able to guarantee a *high quality of life*.

## 3. Towards an active role of the inhabitants: empowering housing

"The *inhabitants are planners because they invent the city every day*"<sup>2</sup>. According to various researches, the lack of adequate housing support policies has led people to autonomously meet their needs. These "*traces of everyday living*"<sup>3</sup> are even more evident in the social housing neighborhoods, where often the historical conditions have produced 'failures' of the projects as they have been realized. These forms of spontaneous appropriations lead us to think

<sup>1</sup> BAKKER, Pepijn, 2017. Expand our movement!. In: International Social Housing Festival

<sup>2</sup> PERCQ, Pascal, 1994. Habitants aménageur. La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube. ISBN 2-87678-170-0

<sup>3</sup> DI BIAGI, Paola, 2016. Quartieri e spazi aperti: un laboratorio progettuale per la rigenerazione urbana. In: Re-cycle housing. Nuovi cicli di vita per l'abitare. Roma: Aracne Editrice. ISBN 978- 88-548-9794-6



about what the real needs of the inhabitants are, and therefore on which elements to take priority first.

The challenge today is to adopt strategies able to recognize the surplus value dictated by this spontaneous activities, through a creative design which allows establishing innovative connections, activating unreleased links in the network of the habitat project. To achieve these goals, two turn out as the key concepts: *sharing* and *empowering*. For empowering, we intend to recognize the role of the inhabitants and provide them with the tools to have an active part in their future. The involvement, and therefore the commitment, become growth factors, both for citizens and for the city.

So, we will try to demonstrate the need for a more flexible planning, that should consider the man, not as only a recipient, but as an **"actor in the city's production process"**<sup>4</sup>. In order that an "urban social design"<sup>5</sup> can be realized, it is necessary to transfer the knowledge and the skills to all the actors involved, and above all to the inhabitants, main drivers of the change towards a smart city because *resilient*. We will try to understand how the inhabitants' role in the bottom-up planning practices evolved over time, such as the various forms of co-operation possible, to define the epistemological and methodological framework for new inclusive, participatory housing models.

#### 4. A collaborative regeneration model

The experiences reported, that, on a global level, see the inhabitants as *"anonymous builders"*<sup>6</sup>, are worth even more when they are used to trigger **inclusive regeneration processes**. In this way, social housing districts go from being waste products of urban transformations to being creativity lands. Research has shown that the inhabitants, because of these shared experiences, develop a collective identity, guaranteeing a life 'continuity' to these neighborhoods. In this way, these districts become the place where to establish new forms of social cohesion that are translated into shared architectural practices.

It appears clear how architecture plays a fundamental role in the creation of spaces (not only physical) for social cohesion. If the social sciences have enriched the architectural practice through a qualitative analysis that has allowed to interpret the real inhabitants' needs, today the architects can take on these needs, to define new **inclusive planning tools**.

Social housing, therefore, to improve the people's living conditions, must open up to new perspectives. To ensure the effectiveness and sustainability, it is necessary a *multidisciplinary, multilateral and multi-scale approach*, providing the inhabitants with the right tools so that they can return to appropriate their *"right to the city"*<sup>7</sup>. Social housing, seen from this broader perspective, can once

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. URBAMONDE, 2015. Production social de l'habitat. Munich: ClimatePartner. ISBN 978-2-8399-1736-0

<sup>5</sup> TATO, Belinda and Jose Luis VALLEJO, 2014. Urbanistica sociale. Domus Green, no. 983, p. 8-11. ISSN 0012-5377

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Program of the conference L'entre-deux barres. Une ethnographie de la transformation des ensembles de logements collectifs par leurs habitants, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> LEFEBVRE, Henri, 2014. Il diritto alla città. [Le droit à la ville]. 1968. Translated Gianfranco Morosato. Verona: Ombre Corte. ISBN 889-75-2294-7

again be a means to find appropriate answers to the quantitative and qualitative challenges facing our cities and which they will face in the future.

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## Biography

**Giorgia Di Cintio.** Licensed Architect and PhD in Architecture. The PhD thesis “The collective dimension of living. Regeneration strategies for social housing neighborhoods”, has been drafted on the themes of social and collaborative housing, of heritage valorization and of urban regeneration. The PhD title was obtained at the School of Advanced Studies "G.d'Annunzio" of Chieti-Pescara (Italy), after a period of research as a Visiting Scholar at the Laboratory Architecture Anthropology of ENSA Paris La Villette (France). Member of the European Network of Housing Research since 2017, she has been selected for numerous international conferences and workshops. Her research focuses on the role of the architecture and urban planning in defining new habitat models. In 2016, she collaborated with PRIN (Project of Significant National Interest) "Re-cycle Italy", in the context of "Recycle fragile territories", developed by the University "G.d'Annunzio" of Chieti-Pescara, on the themes of the reuse of abandoned urban fabrics.